THE CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE EASTERN ASSOCIATION, HELD AT HERTFORD,

MAY 21st and 22d, MDCCLXXXII.

LONDON:

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To the Proteſtant Diſſenting Churches, uſually denominated BAPTISTS, aſſembling for Divine Worſhip.

At CAMBRIDGE;
CHENIES, *Bucks;*
CHESHAM, *Bucks;*
COLNBROOK, *Bucks;*
HERTORD;
HEMPSTEAD, *Herts;*
HITCHIN, *Herts;*
OVER, *Camb.;*
TRING, *Herts;*
WOODROW, *Bucks;*

This CIRCULAR LETTER is with great Reſpect addreſſed

By Robert Robinſon,
Hugh Giles,
James Sleap,
William Walker,
Robert Baſkerville,
John Liddon,
John Geard,
Henry Blaine,
Richard Morris.

James Benham;
William Rackſtraw;
Matthew Pearce,
Francis Chapman;
James Allen,
Daniel Field;

Miniſters and Meſſengers,

Repreſenting the ſaid Churches in Aſſociation.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,

THROUGH the indulgent hand of a wiſe and gracious Providence we met at the place appointed, and have freſh cauſe to magnify God, who favoured us with his benign preſence.

It is uſual on theſe occaſions to addreſs you in a circular letter, thereby to preſent you with ſomething profitable and ſalutary.

Therefore, with real pleaſure, we inform you, the accounts we have received from the churches in this connection are very pleaſing and encouraging. Their preſent ſtate is peaceable and proſperous: but while we have cauſe to rejoice at the proſperity of this connection in general, at the ſame time we are called upon to lament the declining condition of one of our churches in particular. O may the Lord diſperſe the cloud, and ſhine with reviving rays upon that part of his intereſt!

Permit us, with glowing affections, to refreſh your minds with this important truth, that the religion you profeſs is DIVINE, worthy of it's great and infinite Author, and *worthy of all acceptation*, and that by the greateſt of men, endued with the fineſt parts, natural and acquired. Truly Brethren, not many ſuch are acquainted with the power of the goſpel; but when perſons of the moſt refined parts are reduced by ſovereign grace to a real and cordial reception of Jeſus Chriſt in all his offices and ſublime characters, what rich fruits appear, how humble and teachable! Diffident now of their own wiſdom, they with peculiar pleaſure repair to Jeſus, as the great teacher of his people, to be taught by him, in his word, through divine operations, more of the power and glory of the goſpel. How deſirable and lovely to ſee the grace of God thus operating! Such perſons are made EMINENTLY ſerviceable to the cauſe of God and truth. Yet we are free to aſſert, that men of the fineſt natural parts, well improved by all human helps, being deſtitute of this real acquaintance with, and reception of, our Jeſus, have always been, and will ever remain, oppoſers of the wholeſome truths of the goſpel, and enemies to the croſs of Chriſt; *for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are fooliſhneſs unto him; neither can he know them, becauſe they are ſpiritually*

ſpiritually diſcerned. 1 Cor. ii. 14. And yet, *the way-faring man, though a fool* (led by divine grace) *ſhall not err therein,* Iſ. xxxv. 8.

We therefore congratulate you, beloved, as we charitably hope you are the happy recipients of this lovely Immanuel, in all his offices and grand characters: indeed, the ſources of your peace and joy are extenſive and great, too much ſo to be enlarged upon in the ſmall compaſs of a circular letter.—Yet we muſt advert to one or two, as a means, with a divine bleſſing, to expand your ſouls in the way of God.

I. How delectable to know Chriſt as the great high prieſt of your profeſſion, who offered up himſelf as a vicarious ſacrifice to the injured juſtice of God! By this his wrath is appeaſed, and the arms of mercy extended to receive every real penitent.—O what wonderful effects followed the expiring breath of Jeſus, and eſpecially when he delivered theſe triumphing words, *it is finiſhed!* No doubt, pure joy in abundance ſpread it's cheering rays through all the heavenly hoſts, while a tremendous horror, and awful gloom, very ſenſibly filled the regions of deſpair!

Thus your great Redeemer has not only ſatisfied the juſtice of God for you, but he has alſo

vanquiſhed all the powers of hell, drawn the ſting of death, and perfumed the grave with his ſacred body: in a word, Chriſt has conquered all your enemies, therefore rejoice in him at all times.

II. Surely it is animating to reflect on Jeſus, as the only King of Zion, who ſits upon his holy hill to defend his church from the power and rage of all her enemies, and to govern her by his own pure and righteous laws, without any human gloſſes, or vain traditions: theſe have been the bane of Chriſt's cauſe in paſt ages; and, with grief we ſay it, are too much ſo at preſent, and will always remain injurious, where their baſe influence prevails. But it is your glory and happineſs, beloved, to be connected with churches which deteſt all human inventions, and innovations, in the worſhip and order of the Lord's ſanctuary.

III. The interceſſion of Jeſus, who has entered into the holy of holies, as your fore-runner, to plead your cauſe, muſt excite in your immortal ſpirits real pleaſure, if you conſider the perſon with whom he intercedes; it is his Father, and we have juſt reaſon to believe he *hears him always. This is my beloved ſon*, ſaid the Father, *hear him.* Does he call upon us to hear him, and will he not hear him himſelf? Beſides, the perſons, for whom Chriſt intercedes, are the ſons of God; this

this relation your Lord owns in the goſpel by St. John, xxth chapter and 17th verſe, where he ſends Mary with this comfortable meſſage to his diſciples, *Go to my brethren, and ſay unto them, I aſcend unto my Father and your Father, and to my God and your God.* May we not affirm, this makes their cauſe the better, for God is a father both to the pleader, and to thoſe pleaded for, inſomuch that the benefit of all are wrapt up together!— Beloved, your ſurety has the ear and heart of God (if we may be allowed to uſe ſuch language); he is exalted at the Father's right-hand, and there *he ever liveth* to plead for you. Indeed the Lord's pleas are well founded; he is a righteous advocate, and, as ſuch, pleads the holineſs of his life and the merits of his death; and theſe you may be aſſured are powerful pleas. Your Interceſſor can never be ſupplanted, nor loſe his intereſt in the court of heaven; no, he ever remains a glorious prevailing advocate.

Should not theſe conſiderations, dear brethren, ſtir you up to ply a throne of grace in private, and with your families, and alſo with your brethren, when meeting together for that honourable and ſpecial exerciſe: really there is matter for great lamentation, and much ſorrow, that meetings for prayer are ſo ſlighted, and little attended to by profeſſors in general; we are perſuaded, if

private

private prayer, family prayer, and times ſet apart by our churches for mutual prayer were more eſteemed and more attended to in the Spirit of Chriſt, we ſhould ſee a greater glory upon our Zion.

Need we inform you, that your privileges are great; we truſt you are ſenſibly affected therewith: if ſo, this will be manifeſt in the filling up of your places in the churches, with which you are ſeverally connected. We are aware that ſome church members weaken their miniſters hands, and grieve their godly brethren, by cauſeleſly, and without any lawful call in Providence, wandering from their own places on Lord's-Days, and attending other places of worſhip: this is an evil fraught with many hurtful things, and productive of pernicious conſequences; therefore, in love, we intreat you to avoid this diſingenuous practice.

Dear brethren, another diſorder we would juſt glance at and caution you againſt, is, the ſtrange conduct of ſome members of Chriſtian churches, who if a fellow-member offend, and ſome diſlike is conceived againſt a brother or ſiſter, the perſons, indulging this ſpirit, by way of reſentment, abſent themſelves from the Lord's table. Such, by theſe actions, give very little evidence of a meek, loving, and forbearing ſpirit: likewiſe, by this

this conduct, they diſcover a diſlike to the church in general, and that they pay little or no regard to a poſitive command of Chriſt, whom they profeſs to follow. It is no wonder perſons of this unhappy diſpoſition loſe the comforts of religion, become carnal, ſupine, and worldly minded. If any, who are guilty of this ungrateful practice, ſhould read theſe lines, we beſeech you, as you tender the proſperity of your precious ſouls, the glory of God, and the peace of your reſpective churches, reflect on this branch of your conduct, and aſk your own hearts, each of you, this ſerious and important queſtion, Is this procedure to the honour of religion, the glory of the goſpel, or the peace, joy, and comfort of my own ſoul? Truly, theſe momentous things are more cloſely connected than many imagine.

Finally, brethren, we exhort you to prize your great and choice privileges; ſeek for divine aids, that you may make a proper uſe of them; appear in every ſphere of action like thoſe that act under the direction of the Holy Spirit; be concerned for his neceſſary and ſaving influences, remembering theſe words of inſpiration, *If any man have not the ſpirit of Chriſt, he is none of his*, Rom. viii. 9. We beſeech you be followers of God as dear children; live and walk in love; frequently call to mind this precept of your adorable Jeſus,

A new

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye alſo love one another, John xiii. 34. Conſider the glorious dwelling-place of thoſe, who are poſſeſſed of this heavenly ſpirit of love. Sacred writ preſents you with theſe wonderful phraſes, *He, that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him*, 1 John, iv. 16. We hope the injunction of Jeſus, and this grand portion of God's word, will prevail with you to ſeek after a real acquaintance with this God-like ſpirit. It is this that unites and cements the members of churches together, for without love there is no real union. The royal pſalmiſt, in an elegant manner, deſcribes the pleaſing and ſpecial fruits of this amiable ſpirit in the 133d pſalm, to which we refer you. Beloved, *herein is your Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit*; but eſpecially the fruit of love. So ſhall ye give evidence that ye are the diſciples of a loving Saviour; ponder the example of your divine pattern more than ever; look to him for all you want in your journey through life; for in him *all fullneſs dwells:* and although thouſands, and tens of thouſands, have been ſupplied from your Redeemer's fulneſs, it remains inexhauſtible, and Chriſt is yet willing to communicate every ſuitable grace, and needful gift, to all his humble followers. Therefore, live wholly upon him, truſt not to your own ſtrength,

but

but be *ſtrong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.*

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we aſk or think, according to the power that worketh in us: unto him be glory in the church, by Chriſt Jeſus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

HUGH GILES.

BREVIATES.

Hertford, May 21ſt, 1782.

TUESDAY EVENING 6 o'Clock. Miniſters, meſſengers, members of the aſſociated, and other churches met. Mr. BASKERVILLE began in prayer. Mr. GEARD was choſen Moderator. Mr. LIDDON Secretary. Secretary read the letters. General ſtate of the churches flouriſhing. Mr. BLAINE appointed to write to Woodrow church. Mr. GILES to write the circular letter. Mr. ROBINSON concluded in prayer.

WEDNESDAY MORNING 7 o'Clock. The ſame aſſembly met again. Mr. WALKER prayed. Mr. ROBINSON was again deſired to draw up a ſhort plain addreſs on the right obſervation of the Lord's day, to which he conſented. Mr. GILES produced his plan of the circular letter, which was unanimouſly approved. Mr. GEARD concluded in prayer.

HALF PAST 10 o'Clock. Publick worſhip begun by the Moderator, in ſinging the 34th hymn, 2d book. Mr. BLAINE delivered a ſhort diſcourſe on the origin, nature, and end of aſſociations. Mr. MORRIS prayed. Sung the three firſt verſes of the 132d pſalm. Mr. SLEAP preached on the nature and importance of union to Chriſt, from 1 John ii. 28. *And now little children abide in him; that when he ſhall appear, we may have confidence, and not be aſhamed before him at his coming.* Mr. DAVIS, of Waltham-Abbey, prayed. Sung the fourth and fifth verſes of the 132d pſalm. Mr. ROBINSON preached on the fruit of union to Chriſt, from the goſpel of John xv. 4. *Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itſelf, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye except ye abide in me.* Sung the three laſt verſes of the 132d pſalm. Mr. PILLEY, of Luton, prayed, and the Moderator concluded by giving notice, that the next aſſociation would be at Colnbrook, in the Whitſun-week 1783; but on account of the Midland Aſſociation being at St. Alban's in the Whitſun-week, it has ſince been concluded that this be held at Colnbrook the Tueſday and Wedneſday before Whitſuntide. Services to begin at five on Tueſday evening, ſix on Wedneſday morning, and half paſt ten in the forenoon. Meſſrs. BASKERVILLE and LIDDON to preach; in caſe of failure, Mr. GEARD.

HALF PAST 6 o'Clock in the evening. Mr. LIDDON preached a lecture, on the holineſs of the goſpel, from Titus ii. 11, 12. *For the grace of God which bringeth ſalvation, hath appeared to all men; teaching us that denying ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, we ſhould live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent world.*

Put up at the Wheel, MRS. BENHAM's.